UNITED NATIONS

General Assembly

FIFTY-FIRST SESSION

Official Records

THIRD COMMITTEE
32nd meeting
held on
Monday, 11 November 1996
at 3 p.m.
New York

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 32nd MEETING

Chairman: Mrs. ESPINOZA (Mexico)

CONTENTS

AGENDA ITEM 106: PROMOTION AND PROTECTION OF THE RIGHTS OF CHILDREN (continued)

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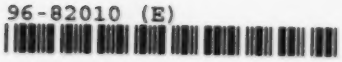
Distr. GENERAL
A/C.3/51/SR.32
13 August 1997

ORIGINAL: ENGLISH

96-82010 (E)



The meeting was called to order at 3.05 p.m.

AGENDA ITEM 106: PROMOTION AND PROTECTION OF THE RIGHTS OF CHILDREN (continued) (A/51/41 (Supplement No. 41), A/51/90, 256, 306 and Add.1, 385, 424, 456 and 492)

1. At the invitation of the Chairman, Archbishop Emeritus Desmond Tutu took a place at the Committee table.

2. Archbishop Emeritus Desmond TUTU said that the world longed for peace and reconciliation. The tragedy of the contemporary world was that children were being deprived of their childhood by war and armed conflict. Many of them were being used as soldiers and had been trained to kill. In Angola and Mozambique, he had seen children who were the casualties of war and the victims of landmines. Countries were unable to feed their populations because of the devastation caused by fighting. Families had been destroyed and homes demolished. Children's education had been disrupted and their health severely affected.

3. Children were innocent victims of ethnic strife in countless countries, such as Bosnia, Burundi, Rwanda, Sri Lanka, Northern Ireland, the Sudan, Angola and Liberia. He urged Governments and the international community to support the right of children to live in a secure home with love, laughter, warmth and joy. The international community must be filled with the passion for peace for the sake of the world's children and their future. All children were entitled to decent housing, health care, an education and security. That was possible if nations committed themselves to doing everything to make the world more child-friendly.

4. Archbishop Emeritus Desmond Tutu withdrew.

5. Mr. ANDJABA (Namibia), speaking on behalf of the Southern African Development Community (SADC), expressed appreciation for the work done by the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and underscored the need to ensure that the Fund received the necessary resources to create a better future for children. If the international community did not act, the progress made thus far would be in great jeopardy. Countries that had not yet ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child should do so, in order to create an environment in which children enjoyed those rights. The Convention should guide national and international action on all aspects of human endeavour in that field. States parties should consider withdrawing reservations to the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women which were contrary to the objectives of those Conventions and international treaty law. Ratification should be motivated by the desire to ensure the enjoyment of those human rights, not by political expediency.

6. The Southern African Regional Preparatory Meeting for the World Congress against Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children had recognized that such exploitation was an increasingly serious problem and had emphasized the need to address the underlying socio-economic, cultural and environmental factors that contributed to it. Participants had stressed the need for more effective

implementation of existing laws and increased allocation of resources to combat the problem. SADC called upon Governments to take all appropriate measures to implement the Declaration and Agenda for Action of the World Congress and urged States, international organizations and non-governmental organizations to work together to eradicate the commercial sexual exploitation of children. In that connection, it commended the excellent report by the Special Rapporteur of the Commission on Human Rights on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography (A/51/456).

7. The mid-decade review of the follow-up to the World Summit for Children showed that widespread progress had been achieved since 1990 and provided a clear indication of what worked in promoting development. The results of the review should help to devise a framework for further development efforts.

8. The problems facing sub-Saharan Africa were manifold: foreign debt service, slow economic growth, inadequate social investment, drought and environmental degradation, the growing HIV/AIDS epidemic, political instability and armed conflict. Additional resources were required to increase the progress being made in all the critical areas. Africa had endorsed the 20/20 Initiative, which called for the restructuring of national budgets and aid flows in favour of basic social services. In that connection, he expressed appreciation to Norway for contributing $19 million for the education of girls in Africa and was optimistic that the donor community would follow suit and substantially increase official development assistance, including contributions to the operational activities of the United Nations system. The plight of the girl child was a critical concern which demanded urgent attention. Denying girl children educational opportunities and an equal right to inheritance impeded their development and condemned them to a life of exploitation. Harmful attitudes and practices such as female genital mutilation, a preference for sons - resulting in female infanticide and prenatal sex selection - and early marriage caused girls irreparable physical, mental and emotional damage and must not be allowed to continue. SADC was determined to eliminate those practices and stressed the importance of the education and health of the girl child. It was seeking to ensure 100 per cent enrolment and retention of girls in school and to promote an educational setting that eliminated all barriers to the schooling of married or pregnant girls and young mothers.

9. The Conference on African Girls and Women, held in September 1996 in Uganda, had emphasized the critical importance of female education in the context of Africa's drive towards education for all, sustainable development, respect for human rights and gender equality. Accordingly, the SADC countries attached high priority to the draft resolution on the girl child currently before the Committee. He commended the report of the expert of the Secretary-General on the impact of armed conflict on children (A/51/306 and Add.1), which provided a basis for renewed action to achieve peace, development, gender equality and tolerance for future generations. Lastly, he stressed the imperative need for the international community to act speedily to provide much-needed humanitarian aid to refugees, particularly women and children, in the Great Lakes region of Africa, especially in eastern Zaire.

10. Ms. SUGIMORI (Japan) noted with satisfaction that progress was being made in most countries towards achieving the objectives set at the World Summit for Children. Nevertheless, many children were still living in exceptionally

difficult circumstances and many related issues must be addressed, including the problem of children in armed conflict, exploitative child labour and child prostitution and pornography. Tackling the root causes of those problems required the combined efforts of Governments, the United Nations and non-governmental organizations. Japan called upon all States that had not yet done so to ratify the Convention on the Rights of the Child as soon as possible, since Governments bore primary responsibility for improving the situation of children. She urged all States parties to ensure the effective implementation of the Convention and underscored the important role being played by the Committee on the Rights of the Child in that regard.

11. Governments and international and non-governmental organizations should cooperate to eliminate all forms of discrimination against the girl child, including the preference for sons and female genital mutilation, and to tackle their root causes.

12. Japan was seriously concerned about the effect that armed conflict was having on children in many parts of the world and welcome the report of the expert of the Secretary-General (A/51/306 and Add.1). The General Assembly should give careful consideration to the expert's recommendations on ways of protecting children. Her country was also concerned about child labour and considered it imperative to prevent that practice, especially in its most dangerous and exploitative forms. The primary responsibility for doing so rested with Governments. Japan was likewise gravely concerned about the problem of the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography and appreciated the work done at the World Congress against Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children, which had helped to focus greater international attention on the question. It welcomed the report by the Special Rapporteur of the Commission on Human Rights on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography (A/51/456) and stressed the need to give careful consideration to the Special Rapporteur's recommendations on measures to be adopted at the national and international levels. Lastly, it commended the important work done by international organizations such as UNICEF, as well as non-governmental organizations, in promoting the rights of children.

13. Mr. BIGGAR (Ireland), speaking on behalf of the States members of the European Union and the associated States of Bulgaria, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia, as well as Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway, said that the principle of the best interests of the child, one of the core principles of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, must at all times be given the fullest expression in United Nations policies and practices relating to children. The Convention offered a clear framework for protecting children, with its emphasis on the rights of the child to survival, protection, development and participation and the priority it gave to reducing infant and maternal mortality, malnutrition and illiteracy, ensuring access to safe drinking water and basic education and combating the root causes of all forms of exploitation and abuse of children. The six States which had not ratified the Convention should do so as soon as possible, and States parties should as soon as possible withdraw any reservations they had made that were contrary to the object and purpose of the Convention and cooperate fully in the reporting process to the Committee on the Rights of the Child.

14. The Beijing Platform for Action had emphasized the need to ensure the full rights of the girl child and protect her from discrimination. That meant ensuring girls' equal access to education and their participation under equal conditions in social, economic and political development and enabling all children to express their views freely on all matters. The continuing violation of the human rights of the girl child through harmful traditional practices was a source of profound concern.

15. The situation of children throughout the world was not encouraging and their rights were being consistently violated. The World Congress against Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children, held in Stockholm in August 1996, had raised national and international awareness of the abhorrent practices occurring in that particular area. The international community must use the momentum thus created to combat such practices and adopt immediate measures such as those outlined in the Stockholm Declaration and Agenda for Action. The European Union intended to press ahead with concerted action to put a stop to that particularly evil and cruel contemporary form of slavery. Agreement had been reached on extending the mandate of EUROPOL to cover trafficking in persons, and children in particular, and on involving it in the fight against sexual exploitation of children. The Special Rapporteur on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography had done commendable work, as had the open-ended working group of the Commission on Human Rights on a draft optional protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child dealing with that issue.

16. The situation of children in armed conflict remained a matter of the utmost concern as borne out by the appalling litany of practices and acts of violence involving children recounted by the expert of the Secretary-General in her report on the impact of armed conflict on children (A/51/306 and Add.1). Children must be protected from the devastating impact of war and it should be declared unreservedly that children must have no part in warfare. A number of the issues raised in the report deserved to be highlighted, including the need to put a stop to the use of children as soldiers, the introduction of a comprehensive international ban on anti-personnel landmines, and the need in conflict situations to provide humanitarian guarantees for the special reproductive health needs of women and girls and steps to protect women and children from rape and other forms of sexual violence. The Secretary-General should appoint, for a three-year period, a special representative on the impact of armed conflict on children. It hoped that the open-ended working group of the Commission on Human Rights on a draft optional protocol on the subject would conclude its useful work the following year.

17. A related issue was the well-being of refugee and displaced children in conflict and non-conflict situations. Priority must be given to respecting their guaranteed rights in emergency situations and States should work closely with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) both during and after emergencies.

18. The situation of street children, a problem not confined to any one country or continent, was also a matter of concern. Such children faced an uncertain future as victims of poverty, exclusion and oppression. They could end up in a vicious circle of crime, drugs and prostitution and fall prey to exploitation, abuse and even unlawful and arbitrary deprivation of liberty or violence.

Governments must act against all those who violated children's rights, working in concert with the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and the International Labour Organisation (ILO).

19. The Convention on the Rights of the Child called for the elimination of child labour and economic exploitation of children, and Governments should implement the ILO Convention on the subject by setting target dates, ensuring the full enforcement of existing laws or adopting further legislation. Both ILO and UNICEF had been working valiantly for decades to halt such exploitation and enable children to lead productive and fulfilled adult lives.

20. Particular care must be taken to ensure the protection of the rights of children in detention; young offenders must be treated with humanity and dignity and the ultimate aim should be the child's reintegration into society.

21. Over the years, UNICEF had contributed enormously to alleviating the plight of children around the world and, notably, children in extremely difficult circumstances. It had the strong support of the European Union, which reaffirmed the principle that high priority and adequate resources should be given to meeting the essential needs of children, in bad times as well as good and at both the national and the international levels. That was children's right and the international community's duty.

22. Mr. REYN (Belgium) said that the recent shocking cases of the kidnapping, sexual abuse and murder of children in Belgium had mobilized public opinion in the country against the sexual exploitation of children. The recent World Congress in Stockholm had reflected international determination to end that particularly pernicious form of contemporary slavery. In line with the Declaration and Agenda for Action adopted by the Congress, Belgium had submitted to the European Union several proposals for common action on trafficking in persons and sexual exploitation of children; the elaboration of a multi-year programme to assist those responsible for combating those scourges; extension of the mandate of EUROPOL to cover such trafficking; and the establishment of a specialized database on organized crime to facilitate police cooperation among the member States of the European Union in the area of trafficking in persons and sexual exploitation of children.

23. In recent years, Belgium had strengthened its penal legislation to allow the prosecution of any act of sexual exploitation of children under the age of 16. Offenders were not released until they had received guidance and treatment and were permanently excluded from working with children.

24. The Convention on the Rights of the Child offered an extremely solid basis for international action to protect the rights of children and ensure their full development as human beings. Belgium favoured the drafting of an international legal instrument that would compel State parties to make the sexual exploitation of children a criminal offence. The drafting of an additional protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child regarding the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography should be expedited and should make good any gaps in the Convention, particularly in articles 34 and 35, which contained no description or definition of such acts as offences, still less as international crimes, and imposed no obligation to penalize offenders, as recommended in the

Stockholm Declaration, which had also recommended the prosecution of sex tourism. The painful long-term consequences of such abhorrent acts for their child victims also underscored the importance of preventive measures and rehabilitation.

25. Belgium was also seriously concerned at the plight of street children, children in armed conflict and children subject to forced labour. It supported the recommendations made by the expert of the Secretary-General in her report (A/51/306 and Add.1). The omnibus resolution on the rights of the child would be adopted without a vote.

26. Mr. WILMOT (Ghana), commending the expert of the Secretary-General for her report on the impact of armed conflict on children (A/51/306 and Add.1), observed that it went beyond the five main issues originally listed in General Assembly resolution 48/157 to address other pertinent issues such as rape and other forms of gender-based violence and sexual exploitation, economic sanctions and measures to ensure the education, health, nutrition and psychological well-being of such children. The expert deserved special praise for her thorough resolution and for having made comprehensive, innovative and far-reaching recommendations, all of which his delegation supported. The appointment of a special representative of the Secretary-General to ensure follow-up action and serve as focal point for the coordination of all activities concerning children affected by armed conflict, both within the United Nations system and with non-governmental organizations, would be very effective in ensuring that children had no part in warfare. Such a post could be financed and serviced by UNICEF and UNHCR, and possibly by the Centre for Human Rights and through voluntary contributions.

27. The Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Declaration of the Rights of the Child served as a compass for navigating the ocean of child-related issues. His delegation appealed to all States which had made reservations to the Convention to withdraw those reservations in the best interests of the child, and to all States parties to implement the Convention fully.

28. The plenary Assembly had recently considered the Secretary-General's report on progress at mid-decade in the implementation of the goals of the World Summit for Children (A/51/256). Gratifying progress had been made in the control of preventable diseases and iodine deficiency disorders and the eradication of some diseases; UNICEF was owed a debt of gratitude for its indefatigable efforts in making those achievements possible. Clearly, investment targeted to the provision of basic social services could substantially reduce problems related to poverty and enhance the well-being of children in a relatively short period of time. However, to achieve the end-decade goals, malnutrition, under-5 mortality and maternal mortality rates and the education of girls still needed to be addressed urgently, while the involvement of children in armed conflict and the HIV/AIDS pandemic threatened to wipe out any gains made thus far.

29. The varying levels of achievement in different countries and regions, as reflected in the report, were attributable mostly to levels of development, scarcity of resources and levels of capacity. More resources must therefore be allocated to the countries in greatest need if the survival, protection and development of their children were to be ensured.

30. The Declaration and Agenda for Action recently adopted by the World Congress against Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children provided a standard-setting framework for further efforts to combat the sexual exploitation of children, focusing on education programmes and prevention, legal reform and law enforcement, rehabilitation and advocacy. The figures released at the Congress as to the total number of young girls for commercial sexual purposes and the incidence of HIV among them should jolt all States into taking collective measures to criminalize and stamp out that cruel and selfish misuse of the girl child. Having long suffered from various forms of discrimination and survived such cultural practices as prenatal sex selection, female infanticide and genital mutilation, the girl child should be spared the agony and indignity of commercial sexual exploitation. Meeting the particular needs of the girl child would ensure the advancement and empowerment of women generally and thus provide a foundation for stable families, communities and societies the world over.

31. Mrs. MORGAN (Mexico) said that the mid-decade review of the achievement of the goals of the World Summit for Children offered an opportunity to focus on fulfilling the commitments made in 1990 in order to ensure the well-being of the world's children, thereby promoting and protecting the broad range of rights recognized in the Convention on the Rights of the Child. She hoped that the few countries which had not yet done so would ratify the Convention, thereby permitting universal ratification.

32. Her Government would continue to take an active part in the negotiations on the drafting of two optional protocols to the Convention - on the sale of children, child pornography and child prostitution and on the impact of armed conflict on children - which would extend the protection afforded by the Convention. The Special Rapporteur on the sale of children, child pornography and child prostitution and the expert on the impact of armed conflict on children had done commendable work and the important recommendations contained in their reports provided valuable inputs to the Committee's work.

33. In its omnibus resolution on the rights of the child, the Committee took an integrated approach to the various problems affecting children in difficult circumstances, an approach which Mexico supported. Mexico also strongly supported the separate resolution on the girl child.

34. Mrs. PHAM THI THANH VAN (Viet Nam) said that her delegation welcomed the report of the Secretary-General's expert on the impact of armed conflict on children (A/51/306 and Add.1). The Vietnamese people understood all too well the sufferings caused by wars, which could sometimes last the length of a childhood. Other children, although their countries were not at war, faced grave threats to their survival - from preventable diseases and malnutrition, prostitution and sexual abuse. The international community must redouble its efforts to alleviate their plight. The adoption at the World Summit for Children of 27 health, education and development goals to be achieved by the end of the century had been a major step forward. One of the most important achievements since the Summit had been the ratification of the Convention on the Rights of the Child by an unprecedented number of States, which had promoted discussion on that important topic and, in some States parties, had led to legal reforms.

35. Her Government saw the needs of children as a priority. Accordingly, it was allocating an increasing proportion of its resources to implementation of the national programme of action for children. In addition, it had passed laws on the protection and care of children and the universal right to primary education. Its social development strategy, in particular the hunger eradication and poverty alleviation programmes, took account of the special needs of children. Committees for the protection and care of children had been established to plan, coordinate and monitor activities of benefit to them. Lastly, public awareness of children's needs was being raised. In pursuing those goals, her Government faced a host of problems stemming from poverty, inadequate infrastructure and low levels of economic, technical and scientific development. If those difficulties were to be overcome, the provision of technical assistance, in addition to financial support, would be vital. She was pleased to note that a number of United Nations agencies had already adjusted their activities towards a capacity-building approach.

36. Mr. MOFOKENG (South Africa) said that his delegation welcomed the report of the Secretary-General's expert on the impact of armed conflict on children (A/51/306 and Add.1). The participatory approach adopted by the expert, involving consultations with United Nations agencies, governments, intergovernmental and regional organizations and non-governmental organizations, had contributed to the high standard of the report and should serve as a model for the preparation of future reports.

37. The report depicted the terrible suffering of children caught up in armed conflict, particularly those forced to participate as combatants. In South Africa, under the new Constitution, no one under the age of 18 could participate in active combat, although youths aged at least 17 could enlist in the armed forces. The report also made clear the horrific effects of landmines, which, long after the end of a conflict, could kill or maim innocent civilians, a problem all too familiar in his region. South Africa had suspended the operational use of anti-personnel landmines and prohibited the export of all types of landmines. In addition, his Government was supporting the campaign for an international ban on the production, stockpiling, transfer and use of anti-personnel landmines and was committed to enhancing international cooperation for mine clearance.

38. He hoped that it would be possible to build upon the valuable work of the Secretary-General's expert. His Government supported her proposal that a special representative should be appointed to continue the process and urged that adequate resources should be made available for the creation of such a post. In addition, a meeting should be held some years hence to assess the progress made. The international community must envision a society free of conflict where children could grow up as children, not weapons of war.

39. Mrs. CASTRO de BARISH (Costa Rica), speaking on behalf of the Central American States, expressed her delegation's satisfaction with the Secretary-General's report on progress at mid-decade in the implementation of General Assembly resolution 45/217 on the World Summit for children (A/51/256) and with the number of States that had become parties to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, although it must be pointed out that reservations to the Convention did not help to promote its goals and purposes.

40. The Central American States were working actively to promote the Convention by setting up a framework for the social and legal protection of children. In response to the large number of adoptions taking place in Costa Rica, for example, the Government was preparing a legal code for minors based on the Convention. Guatemala had implemented a programme aimed at promoting economic growth, strengthening social policies, achieving the goals of the World Summit for Children, improving the allocation of resources and strengthening local government and community organization. It had also implemented a "baby-friendly hospital" initiative. Honduras had adopted a legal code on children and adolescents that formalized the fundamental rights and freedoms of children, established the protections to be guaranteed them by the State, created the organs and procedures required to provide them with such protections and facilitated their access to the courts. Nicaragua was carrying out mass immunization campaigns to lower child mortality caused by preventable illnesses and was developing a series of health and rehabilitation initiatives aimed at eliminating the remaining effects of war on Nicaraguan children.

41. The Central American States also supported the content and conclusions of the Secretary-General's report on the exploitation of child labour (A/51/492). On the basis of a memorandum of understanding signed in 1995 between the Governments of Spain and Germany and ILO, the Central American States were working on a regional project to eradicate child labour, a problem which had grown beyond the control of individual Governments because of development policies and economic globalization.

42. The excellent report on the impact of armed conflict on children (A/51/306 and Add.1) revealed, inter alia, that there were currently more than 27.4 million refugees and displaced persons throughout the world, of whom at least half were children. As a particular example of the devastating effects of war on children, nearly 190,000 Nicaraguan children had been directly affected by the recent civil war, while others continued to be injured or killed by anti-personnel landmines left over from the conflict.

43. The Special Rapporteur's report on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography (A/51/456) showed that Governments, non-governmental organizations, individuals and society as a whole must be involved in combating the commercial and sexual exploitation of children. The report's recommendations were realistic and practical, but it was also necessary to emphasize that justice systems must be speedy, incorruptible and particularly protective of children in order to ensure the effective prevention of such exploitation.

44. Speaking on behalf of the Group of 77 and China, she announced that the Group had decided to oppose the inclusion of the phrase "within existing resources" in the resolutions of the Third Committee, as such phraseology fell within the purview of the Fifth Committee. Because of the importance which they attached to the issue, the Group of 77 and China intended to present the amendments concerned for voting, whenever appropriate.

45. Ms. SETYAWATI (Indonesia) said that Indonesia was committed to the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and had submitted its initial report some three years earlier. Her Government valued the comments and recommendations made by the Committee on the Rights of the Child with regard

to its report and was addressing the areas of concern that had been identified. The Committee's work would be enhanced still further by closer coordination with the specialized agencies.

46. The rights of the child had been integrated fully into Indonesia's national development programmes. The Government had established 12 central indicators to measure the progress achieved, ranging from infant mortality and birth rates to nutritional intake statistics. Approximately 29 per cent of the national budget was allocated for basic social services. Programmes had been initiated to eliminate poliomyelitis by the end of the decade; establish "baby-friendly hospitals"; and promote breastfeeding as a means of reducing protein energy malnutrition within the next four years. It was anticipated that by the year 2003, at least 90 per cent of Indonesia's children would be enrolled in basic education.

47. Her Government was working to bring Indonesia's legislation into line with the Convention and was raising public awareness of its provisions through a national action plan. There was concern to ensure that the Convention and the relevant recommendations of international conferences were implemented without prejudice to Indonesia's traditional values.

48. Since children were often forced to seek employment because of their family's financial circumstances, measures aimed at alleviating poverty were crucial. Recently, a national workshop had been held in collaboration with ILO and UNICEF to examine the ILO Minimum Age Convention 1973 (No. 138). Her delegation commended the pragmatic approach of the International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour (IPEC) and the generosity of those donor countries which supported the Programme.

49. Sexual abuse and exploitation presented a grave threat to children. Her Government therefore supported the drafting of an optional protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child concerning the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography and urged that the working group of the Commission on Human Rights established to that end should incorporate in its draft the outcomes of the World Congress against Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children.

50. Ms. ZIMRIN (Israel) said that Israel was proud of its contribution to the promotion and protection of the rights of children. In particular, her Government had taken measures to raise public awareness of the problems of child sexual abuse, child pornography and child prostitution. While there was a danger that journalists might sensationalize cases involving children, sex and violence, Israel's experience had shown that the media could be harnessed to serve the best interests of children. In 1955, the Knesset had passed pioneering legislation to spare child victims of sex crimes the trauma of testifying in court. Instead, minors were interviewed by a social worker who then appeared in court on their behalf. There was also a Children's Advocacy Committee, composed of members of the Knesset from across the political spectrum, which sought to ensure that legislation on the protection of children was implemented.

51. Her Government had provided a telephone hotline for child victims of sex crimes; it also offered therapy and shelter, as well as conducting educational

and prevention programmes, training and research. Parents and children could submit complaints against schools and their staff to a special ombudsman. All those services were coordinated by a single umbrella body to ensure a comprehensive approach. The main focus was always on the best interests of the child.

52. Difficult though it might be, there was a need to provide therapy for perpetrators, as well as their victims. Thus, when a child was sexually abused within the family, the entire family received counselling. In the case of perpetrators, such assistance was offered as a supplement to punishment, not as a substitute.

53. Where immigrant families were concerned, it was often difficult to define child abuse since legitimate methods of child-rearing in one culture might be condemned as abusive in another. Furthermore, parents of immigrant families faced particular pressures and the resulting sense of frustration could lead to aggression against their children. Israel, where immigrants constituted 10 per cent of the population, had acquired considerable experience in those problems. That experience had proved valuable in dealing not only with new immigrants, but also with families belonging to the Arab minority. In addition, Israeli and Palestinian scholars were currently participating in a conference on human rights education for young children; on a more practical level, Israel's health authorities were immunizing Palestinian children and professional help was being offered in cases of domestic violence. Israel had also become a haven for children from war-torn areas or in need of medical treatment, in particular victims of the Chernobyl nuclear disaster. Her delegation hoped that the international community's commitment to the protection of children, as reflected in the impressive number of ratifications of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, would lead to greater sharing of experience and knowledge for the benefit of children everywhere.

54. Mr. AMEGBLEAME (Togo) said that while the ratification of the Convention on the Rights of the Child by an overwhelming majority of States reflected the commitment of the international community to promoting those rights, children the world over continued to be the victims of sexual abuse, economic exploitation and enlistment in armed conflicts. His Government deplored those practices and called upon all States parties to the Convention to adopt comprehensive policies for promoting and protecting the rights of children and for providing a secure environment in which children could develop their full potential. The family had a special role to play in that regard.

55. Togo's children and young people were among its most precious resources. Accordingly, the rights of the child had been incorporated into the 1992 Constitution. His Government was committed to protecting those rights and had recently organized a series of regional seminars on that topic, in collaboration with various non-governmental organizations. At the most recent such seminar, representatives of 10 African States had lent their support to the creation of an international coalition of non-governmental organizations working for the rights of children and to enhanced cooperation between those organizations and national Governments.

56. Mr. KOZIY (Ukraine) said that no task was more important than the promotion and protection of the rights of children. The first step towards achieving that

goal must be the full implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the World Declaration on the Survival, Protection and Development of Children adopted at the World Summit for Children, as well as the relevant recommendations of the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action of the World Conference on Human Rights.

57. His delegation welcomed the comprehensive report on the impact of armed conflict on children (A/51/306 and Add.1), prepared by the Secretary-General's expert, and supported her proposal that a special representative on the subject should be appointed. The interim report of the Special Rapporteur of the Commission on Human Rights on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography (A/51/456) drew attention to the plight of the victims of those deplorable practices. The valuable recommendations of the Special Rapporteur and of the first World Congress against Commercial Sexual Exploitation of children, held in Stockholm in August 1996, must be translated into practical action.

58. In Ukraine, the worsening of both quantitative and qualitative indicators of the health of the population in general, and of children in particular, was cause for concern. The country was experiencing a demographic crisis, the mortality rate having exceeded the birth rate since 1991, and children continued to suffer the effects of the Chernobyl nuclear disaster. In order to address those problems, his Government had adopted a special programme aimed at creating favourable conditions for the development of children, preventing childhood diseases, improving medical care, eliminating malnutrition and reducing crime, drug abuse, alcoholism and smoking among children. In addition, an interdepartmental commission had recently been created to coordinate implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and other relevant international instruments.

59. Mr. BIN RABIAH (United Arab Emirates) said that, despite a slight improvement in the situation of the world's children since the World Summit for children in 1990, poverty, lack of development and armed conflict, not to mention social and economic disparities, continued to affect children, particularly those living in poverty. Malnutrition, poor health services and high levels of child mortality were of the utmost concern to the some 60 per cent of the world's population that lived in poverty. The international community must devise an appropriate strategy to respond to their needs.

60. Many millions of children were caught up in and adversely affected by armed conflict. It was therefore of the utmost importance that Governments should redirect investment towards humanitarian protection and sustainable development. The assistance given by industrialized countries to developing countries must also be expanded to permit the improvement of appropriate national services.

61. In the past two decades, the position of children in his country had been greatly improved. Children were considered a valuable resource and concern for them was the cornerstone of national development policy. Special attention was paid to children's education and health, and priority was being given to child health and vaccination programmes. There had been a significant decrease in levels of child mortality and every effort was being made to produce a healthy new generation.

62. The United Arab Emirates was educating its society in the concerns and rights of the child. Nurseries, kindergartens and special education centres had been established to help mothers raise their children in accordance with modern practices. His Government had extended assistance to children affected by armed conflict and natural disasters in other countries, and had helped to build schools and child-care centres in certain developing countries.

63. Children should be the primary concern of comprehensive development plans and the international community had a responsibility to support development primarily by strengthening children's inalienable rights and preventing their exploitation.

64. Ms. HOLM-PEDERSEN (International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC)) said that IFRC was especially concerned with the continued use of children as soldiers, the needs of refugee and displaced children, the importance of psycho-social aspects linked to children's local reality and the hardships suffered by children in countries subject to economic sanctions.

65. The International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement was fully committed to the principle of the non-recruitment and non-participation of children below the age of 18 in armed conflicts and to promoting that principle at the international level. IFRC urged Governments to support the drafting of an optional protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child to that effect; it also underlined the obligation of Governments to register all children born in territories under their jurisdiction, thereby providing them with documentary proof of age. The psycho-social well-being of children affected by armed conflict should be a concern at the earliest stages of programme development, and traditional values and concepts should be used to meet children's needs in more effective and sustainable ways.

66. While the decision to use economic sanctions to put pressure on individual countries was a political tool available to the international community, it was necessary to point out that the consequences of such sanctions were borne disproportionately by women and children in the countries concerned. IFRC therefore urged States to consider the negative impact of sanctions on the humanitarian situation and to monitor the consequences once sanctions had been imposed. It likewise urged States subject to sanctions to provide relief to vulnerable groups and to the victims of other humanitarian emergencies that might occur in their countries.

67. Mr. PACE (Malta) said that, in Malta, children's rights were protected by the Constitution and other legal instruments. Education was provided free of charge for all children from kindergarten to university, while children up to the age of 15 were protected from child labour. A full range of health services was available free of charge at State hospitals and community health clinics, and infant mortality rates had been drastically reduced. The country's social security legislation allocated funds for the support of children and families in various circumstances, and the authorities were taking active measures to assist young single mothers and curb the impact of such new threats as illicit drug trafficking. Appalled at the plight of children in many parts of the world, the Government and people of Malta also continued to support the international programmes of United Nations agencies and non-governmental organizations which benefited children worldwide.

68. Ms. SIBAL (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)) said that UNESCO attached particular importance to the emphasis placed on education for peace in the report on the impact of armed conflict on children (A/51/306 and Add.1) was ready to provide US$ 400,000 in emergency assistance for children affected by the conflict in the Great Lakes region of Africa and stressed that education must play a key role in forging the true culture of peace that was needed to resolve that conflict and others over the long term.

69. In the context of the need for new policies to guarantee equal access to education, UNESCO had decided to enhance UNICEF/UNESCO joint programmes dealing with education and assistance for children living under especially difficult circumstances, particularly children in conflict with the law and vulnerable to sexual exploitation. It had launched a special programme emphasizing the enhancement of learning opportunities for young people in countries in post-conflict situations or undergoing rapid social and political change, in an effort to foster the reintegration of such young people into their society and to enhance their employment opportunities. UNESCO also gave high priority to the education and training of young demobilized soldiers and was especially interested in the problem of child soldiers and their social reinsertion.

70. In keeping with its view of education as a basic right for children, UNESCO recommended that educational opportunities should be provided for children affected by war or violent conflict; that appropriate educational activities should be provided to refugee children; and that education should be included in all humanitarian operations taking place during or after a conflict. With regard to children as victims of armed conflicts, it recommended that local governments, parents and the international community should adopt measures prohibiting the physical and psychological exploitation of children in armed conflicts, as well as policies ensuring their protection and their basic right to grow in a peaceful environment. Trauma therapy and rehabilitation programmes for former child combatants must also be developed and included as an essential component of all peace-building activities.

71. Mr. FREEDMAN (International Labour Organisation (ILO)) said that the Organization's main instrument on child labour, the ILO Minimum Age Convention 1973 (No. 138), which, unlike previous conventions on child labour applied to all sectors of economic activity. ILO had urged its member States to ratify it, thereby committing themselves to effectively abolishing child labour and progressively raising the minimum working age to a level consistent with the fullest physical and mental development of young people. It had also begun preparing a new international instrument aimed at banning the most intolerable forms of child labour, namely, those contrary to fundamental human rights in general and those which gravely threatened children's safety and health or prevented them from attending school normally.

72. ILO was continuing to expand the implementation of its International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour (IPEC) which sought to progressively eliminate child labour by bringing about a fundamental change in social attitudes and by strengthening the capacity of countries to amend their educational and labour policies. It had also started research on labelling programmes and campaigns aimed at raising the awareness of consumers about the use of child labour in the products that they bought. In view of the need for cooperation at the national level among ministries, law enforcement agencies and

non-governmental organizations, ILO was attempting, through its IPEC technical assistance programmes, to establish national steering committees comprising representatives of the various sectors concerned. At the same time, it was enhancing its cooperation with other relevant organizations, such as UNICEF, at the international level in order to more effectively combat child labour.

73. Ms. FOO (Singapore) said that, while agreeing with the general thrust of the statement made by Costa Rica on behalf of the Group of 77 and China and with the argument that the Fifth Committee was the appropriate forum for discussing budgetary issues, her delegation hoped that it would not be necessary to put the phrase "within existing resources" to a vote whenever it appeared in a Third Committee draft resolution. Her delegation trusted that the Third Committee would be able to work in a spirit of consensus and would not allow the issue of resources to distract it from the social, cultural and humanitarian questions which were its primary responsibility and original mandate.

The meeting rose at 6.20 p.m.